

2025

# Insight Report

What we Heard from the Research New Brunswick  
Program Optimization Project



**Powering  
Discovery  
Together**

# Fund Research & Innovation, Connect the Dots, & Advance Impact

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# Message from the Chief Executive Officer

Over the course of the last year, Research New Brunswick set out to connect with the research community. We wanted to hear from you about research funding needs, and how our programs and processes can be improved to best support the ecosystem.

Today, we are sharing the results of what we heard. Overall, there was positive feedback about our existing funding programs, as well as many important suggestions about how we can become more efficient, responsive, and supportive as a funder in the research ecosystem. Some of the key insights that ResearchNB took away from our engagement process were:



- Our application, awarding, and reporting processes can be streamlined to better meet the needs of the research community.
- There is not enough funding available to support the talent needs of the research ecosystem in New Brunswick.
- As a provincial research funding agency, ResearchNB needs to be able to support research across the full spectrum of capabilities in our province, from fundamental to applied, social sciences to STEM, and everything in between.
- ResearchNB can play a leadership role in science communication. As a research funder, our organization is uniquely positioned to connect the dots between the research we support and the people who can put it into action.

Accountability is one of our core values at ResearchNB. Our team wrote this report to summarize, to the best of our abilities, what we heard from the research community. In the months to come, we will be sharing updates about how we are taking action. We will be accountable about the improvements we have made, the work that is still underway, and the steps we may not be able to take right now, because your engagement matters to us.

On behalf of our whole team, I sincerely thank every person who took the time to complete our survey, participate in an interview, or attend a stakeholder session last year. We gained invaluable insights through the Funding Optimization Project, and I am looking forward to hearing more of it in the months to come.

Candice Pollack  
Chief Executive Officer

# Introduction

ResearchNB supports research in New Brunswick. With a mission to power discovery together, ResearchNB funds leading edge research, promotes research excellence, and connects the dots across the agriculture, forestry, oceans, health, and energy sectors to build a well-funded and impactful research ecosystem.

Over the past two years, ResearchNB has undergone significant growth. Beginning with a merger between the New Brunswick Health Research Foundation and BioNB in 2023, and followed by the transition of the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation's research funding programs in 2024, our organization has become the primary source of provincial research funding in New Brunswick.

ResearchNB has been built upon the legacies of three separate, critical provincial entities who each provided unique support to our research and innovation ecosystem. However, in order to best support the ecosystem with the resources we have to offer, our team needed to realign and redesign our funding programs to create efficiencies, streamline applications, and ultimately, better serve the research and innovation community.

Accordingly, over the course of 2024, ResearchNB launched the Funding Optimization Project. The objectives of this initiative were to:

- Review uptake, user experience, and impact of current ResearchNB funding programs;
- Realign or redesign research funding programs to best meet the needs of ResearchNB's target audiences; and
- Review and improve user experiences with ResearchNB funding applications, administration, and reporting requirements.

The following report provides an overview of the methodologies used throughout the project, the insights we heard from participants in the Funding Optimization Project, and the next steps that the research and innovation ecosystem can expect from ResearchNB.



# Methodology

The Funding Optimization Project involved several phases of work. First, the ResearchNB team completed an internal audit of all existing funding programs to review program uptake, objectives, success rates, and overall administrative requirements. Following the internal program audit, the team employed a participatory evaluation approach through several engagement mechanisms:

- **Online survey:** An online survey was distributed to all individuals with an active profile on the ResearchNB funding portal to ask about user experience with the portal. A total of 73 individuals participated in the survey.
- **Key informant interviews:** Interviews were conducted with 14 administrators at various research institutions in New Brunswick. The interviews were conducted between January and February 2024, and included representatives from Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick, Mount Allison University, St. Thomas University, University of New Brunswick, Université de Moncton, Centre de formation médicale du N.-B., Atlantic Cancer Research Institute, the New Brunswick Community College, and the Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick.
- **Focus groups:** A series of in-person engagement sessions were held at the following public research institutions in New Brunswick: Dalhousie Medicine New Brunswick, Mount Allison University, St. Thomas University, Horizon Health Network, University of New Brunswick, Université de Moncton, Centre de formation médicale du N.-B., Atlantic Cancer Research Institute, the New Brunswick Community College, and the Collège Communautaire du Nouveau-Brunswick. In total, over 150 individuals participated in these sessions.

The third phase of work under our Funding Optimization Project was the redesign process, which has been informed by the insights we heard from researchers, trainees, and administrators throughout the province, as well as the guiding principles of the ResearchNB Funding Philosophy (see Appendix A).

Lastly, once our new funding programs are launched in April 2025, the final phase of Program Optimization will involve evaluation and continuous improvement. At ResearchNB, we know that our funding programs provide critical support to our ecosystem. As such, we want to hear from you – we plan to continuously evaluate our programs to ensure we are doing our best to power discovery together in New Brunswick.



# Insights

## Funding Program Administration

At ResearchNB, most of our funding programs are administered through a SurveyMonkey product, more commonly referred to as “the Portal”. With the exception of Research Chairs and the Graduate Scholarship Program, all applications for research funding are submitted and reviewed through the Portal, and ResearchNB administers awards and conducts all status reporting on this platform as well.

During the Funding Optimization Project, ResearchNB sought feedback from the research community on their experience with our organization’s funding administration processes, and the Portal. Participants indicated that the Portal is generally easy to navigate, and that they appreciated that ResearchNB employees are accessible to troubleshoot or otherwise support funding applications. In our user experience survey, approximately 77% of respondents indicated that they had completed the full award administration process from application to final reporting, indicating that the participants who provided feedback in the survey generally have experience with the full lifecycle of grant administration with ResearchNB.

Throughout our various engagement activities, researchers and administrators offered the following recommendations for improvement to ResearchNB’s funding administration process:



## Applications

- Provide a preview of the application form on the ResearchNB website to enable applicants to prepare the required information before initiating a funding request.
- Ensure that all content on the Portal is available and accurate in both official languages.
- Align word counts within each application with the relative weighting of the evaluation criteria, and limit requested information to the materials that will be considered in application review process.
- Provide each institution’s Office of Research Services with access to the application forms submitted from applicants within their institution on the Portal.

# Evaluations

- Provide a preview of the evaluation criteria and weighting for each funding program on the ResearchNB website.
- Create evaluation criteria that are inclusive of research across disciplines and expand the concept of impact to be inclusive of fundamental and social science research.
- Provide researchers with the opportunity to suggest reviewers with subject-matter knowledge to review their application.
- Leverage the Portal to offer researchers constructive feedback on their applications.
- Remove criterion that focuses on the profile or reputation of the researcher from the evaluation criteria for certain funding programs.
- Establish a peer review process whereby applicants are reviewed by and compared to other applicants within their priority sector.

# Award Administration

- Provide applicants with more time to return their signed Notice of Decision.
- Ensure the Notice of Decision clearly articulates the Award start date, end date, as well as financial disbursement dates.
- Communicate dates regarding funding program closures, decisions, and disbursements.
- Improve the funding disbursement process to minimize delays in payments.
- Issue one Notice of Decision for signature for researchers who receive funding under a funding partnerships program (e.g. DUO, Chesley).
- Share information about successful awardees and funding program success rates.

# Reporting

- Develop tailored reports for each funding program that are clear, targeted, and proportional to the size of the award.
- Inform the research community about how ResearchNB uses funding reports.
- Improve the clarity of the instructions for completing final reports.
- Leverage final reports to obtain plain language summaries or other tools that can support ResearchNB communications about ongoing or complete research projects.



# Research Funding Programs

During the 2024-2025 fiscal year, ResearchNB maintained all 17 funding programs that had previously been delivered by both ResearchNB and the New Brunswick Innovation Foundation. These programs included:

Strategic Opportunities Fund	Strategic Initiative Grant
Partners Match Fund	Lab-to-Market Fund
Talent Recruitment Fund	Emerging Projects Fund
Research Assistantships Initiative	Equipment Fund
Research Professionals Initiative	Research-Related Support Fund
Bridge Grant	Knowledge Translation Grant
Establishment Grant	Undergraduate/ Medical Summer Student-ship Program
Graduate Studentship Program	Clinical Scholarships
Masters/ Post-Doctoral Fellows Scholarship	

In our user experience survey, approximately 62% of respondents rated their satisfaction with ResearchNB as a provincial funding organization as very high (between 8-10), indicating general support for existing funding programs. The following section highlights the feedback that was provided from participants in the Funding Optimization Project regarding both ResearchNB’s existing programs and the unmet funding needs of the research ecosystem.



# Talent

Participants in the Optimization Project articulated that there is simply not enough funding available to support talent. Current challenges include:

- Colleges have limited ability to obtain funding for talent from other sources due to their ineligibility for most Tri-Council funding opportunities.
- Current talent funding programs offer insufficient stipends to pay students an attractive wage during the duration of their studies. Accordingly, talent recruitment is challenging when larger institutions offer more funding.
- Talent programs focus too heavily on recruitment rather than retention – providing competitive stipends and long-term funding would ensure students remain in New Brunswick after graduation.
- More talent programs with a focus on (1) supporting early-career researchers to establish their research programs and (2) funding dedicated research technicians and high-tech equipment specialists are needed.

Participants indicated that they appreciated several ResearchNB funding programs on offer. In particular, they highlighted the importance of the Talent Recruitment Fund and Establishment Grant as critical programs to support early-career researchers, as well as the Research Assistantship Initiative as an important support for hiring students to complete research projects. Several participants also spoke highly of funding for Research Chairs, which ResearchNB provides through targeted partnership investments with research institutions in the province. Researchers highlighted that Research Chairs provide national visibility to New Brunswick-based researchers.



Throughout the engagement process, participants also offered a number of suggestions for improvements to current talent funding programs:

- Create talent programs that offer tailored support to researchers who are at different stages of their careers.
- Offer funding to hire and train community members, such as employees of non-profit organizations, to collect and interpret data for research projects.
- Remove the criteria of Tri-Council studentship program applications from ResearchNB studentship opportunities to improve access to funding for international students.
- Add student or research professional salaries as eligible expenses for all funding programs.
- Amend the funding program criteria and eligible expenses to enable colleges to hire co-op students as part of talent funding programs.
- Align ResearchNB scholarships with national graduate scholarships, while providing a backup program for students who did not receive national funding.
- Offer two rounds of the Talent Recruitment Fund annually.

## Infrastructure

A general theme that arose among participants regarding infrastructure funding related to provincial funding support to match federal infrastructure grants. At present, the largest research infrastructure investment fund is run by the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI). The John Evans Leadership Fund (JELF) provides 40% of the costs of a research infrastructure project, which requires a 40% match from the province and another 20% to be provided from other sources. At present, there is no automatic match provided for CFI JELF funds, which results in some projects being unable to put up the matching requirement needed to secure federal investment. Researchers suggested that there should be a dedicated pot of funding for matching CFI JELF applications at ResearchNB.

In addition, participants highlighted a broader need for funding to support platform or core research infrastructure that could be used to support researchers across institutions in the province. A gap was also identified relating to funding for the renewal or maintenance of research infrastructure.



## Ideas

The primary feedback offered by participants regarding funding for ideas is that there is insufficient research funding support for fundamental, social sciences, and humanities research in New Brunswick. Current funding programs at ResearchNB are heavily oriented toward applied research and economic impact. Researchers articulated a need for more flexible funding programs that require limited matching funds, and provide smaller amounts of money over longer periods of time to better support research across disciplines. Additional suggestions included:

- Establish a funding program for research projects that evaluate the impacts of past projects.
- Offer funding programs that supplement the Discovery Grants offered by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council of Canada.
- Bring back the Social Innovation Research Fund to support research activities in the social sciences and humanities.
- Reduce eligibility criteria relating to partnerships in order to improve funding accessibility for fundamental researchers.
- Extend the current Bridge Grant program to apply to all Tri-Council agencies.



## Strategic Opportunities

With respect to strategic funding opportunities, participants were generally supportive of ResearchNB engaging in funding partnerships to advance research in New Brunswick. Existing strategic initiatives funding programs were considered important, and some participants suggested that ResearchNB should aim to enter into formal agreements with the Tri-Council agencies to increase investment into research in the province. A key gap that was identified related to team grants that encouraged inter-institution or interdisciplinary collaborations in research, as well as funding grants that offer long-term support for a research program.

# Knowledge Mobilization

Throughout our engagement sessions, ResearchNB sought feedback from participants on how to demonstrate the impact of research in our province. Many researchers expressed significant interest in ResearchNB taking on a role in knowledge mobilization, and facilitating connections throughout the community. The following recommendations to advance research impact were offered by participants:

- Support researchers to engage in storytelling about their work through podcasts, magazine articles, public talks, and policy briefs.
- Collect testimonials from citizens who have been impacted by research in New Brunswick.
- Host community workshops, Science Rendez-vous, and other public events periodically to convene a diverse audience of researchers, industry partners, citizens and decision-makers in a given field.
- Offer knowledge mobilization workshops for students and researchers to support skill development in communications and knowledge translation.
- Highlight researchers and their projects through social media and Researcher of the Month acknowledgments that profile leaders and celebrate research impact.
- Design and announce awards that celebrate research success stories.
- Establish a provincial database of researchers and research projects so that individuals can easily connect with others in different disciplines for collaboration.
- Leverage the status reporting on ResearchNB grant funding to obtain impact stories from researchers about their work.
- Grow Health Research Symposium to a broader Research Week to showcase research impacts across disciplines and priority sectors.
- Play a connector role between researchers, industry partners, and government to facilitate research collaborations.



# Next Steps

ResearchNB is committed to adopting a culture of innovation within our organization. Our team is dedicated to advancing research in New Brunswick, and we know that we cannot accomplish this without continuous evaluation of our funding programs.

The feedback we received throughout the Funding Optimization Project has been used to establish our Funding Philosophy, as well as to inform the launch of our new suite of funding programs. These programs will be implemented in the 2025-2026 fiscal year, and will endeavour to streamline funding applications, address existing barriers, and leverage the funding available from ResearchNB to the maximum of its potential.

Our team understands that the funding programs we offer are important pieces of a larger puzzle of research funding in New Brunswick. As such, we want to ensure that researchers and administrators across the province have the opportunity to hear from us directly about our new programs, our Funding Philosophy, and our refreshed vision for the future of ResearchNB. In the spring, our team will be hitting the road, with plans to visit every research institution that is eligible for ResearchNB funding. We will be using this opportunity to connect with you, to talk about our new programs, and to hear your feedback.

In addition to our commitment to innovation, we are also dedicated to demonstrating the value of research. ResearchNB believes that research is a key driver of positive impacts for our province. Our objective as an organization is to communicate that impact more effectively, so that New Brunswickers believe it too.

Looking forward, our team will be continuously improving our programs and services, our administration processes, and our reporting requirements so that we can better support researchers and better capture the impacts of your work. ResearchNB deeply appreciates the feedback we have received through this process, and we intend to keep asking for more in the years ahead.

On behalf of the whole team at ResearchNB, thank you to all of the participants who took the time to inform our Funding Optimization Project.





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# Appendix A

## ResearchNB- Funding Philosophy and Framework

### Philosophy

We are committed to supporting projects that push boundaries, generate impact and advance research excellence for the betterment of New Brunswick.

### Guiding principles

**Alignment:** Prioritize fundamental, applied and clinical research that aligns with the priority sectors as defined by the Province of New Brunswick by investing in talent, infrastructure and supporting strategic research investments.

**Scientific merit:** Award research projects that are successful through a rigorous peer review and demonstrate scientific excellence.

**Evaluation and Accountability:** Implement regular evaluations to revise and adjust funding programs and allocations based on changing needs, technological advances, and lessons learned from funded projects.

**Equity and Transparency:** Aim for an equitable distribution of funds among sectors, regions and institutions by implementing a robust, inclusive and transparent evaluation framework. Funding will be directed exclusively to support research projects and teams that are located in the province of New Brunswick or aim to directly benefit the citizens of New Brunswick to ensure alignment with local priorities and impact.

**Knowledge Mobilization:** Promote research capabilities within New Brunswick and mobilize research findings in priority sectors move research from knowledge to action.

**Collaboration:** Encourage projects that bring together different fields to solve complex problems through a multidisciplinary approach and facilitate collaboration across institutions on a provincial, regional and national level.

### Framework

ResearchNB grant framework is based on 4 funding pillars: Growing Talent, Funding Infrastructure, Supporting Ideas and Building Strategic Partnerships.

**Pillar 1- Growing Talent** - To attract, retain, and develop talented researchers and teams across various career stages, from early-career researchers to seasoned experts.

**Pillar 2- Funding Infrastructure** - To support the development and maintenance of critical research infrastructure, such as labs, equipment, and digital platforms, that are essential for cutting-edge research.

**Pillar 3- Supporting Ideas** - To support innovative and high-impact research ideas at various stages, from exploratory studies to large-scale projects with potential real-world applications.

**Pillar 4- Building Strategic Partnerships** - Create and support targeted ResearchNB funding programs or partnerships that aim to leverage the knowledge and research activities in a priority area.